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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI'S INTERIOR MINISTER ON DECENTRALIZATION

1. (U) During a December 20 meeting with visiting REDSO Director, Andrew Sisson, Ambassador, REDSO Chief of Limited Presence Countries, Andrew Karas, and USAID Education Program Director, Alpha Bah, Minister of Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh offered his perspective on Djibouti's recent efforts at decentralization. For the Minister, decentralization has as its central purpose the referral of prime decision-making power to the people at the grassroots level.

2. (U) Bouh told Sisson his government decided to embark on an "adventure" with decentralization after 28 years of "hesitation." He noted that until now, all decisionmaking has occurred in Djibouti city, even those decisions that identify well-drilling sites at the community level. "This is not acceptable," he concluded. According to Bouh, the future would bring to local governments the opportunity to design their own development plans and to take all required decisions. The Minister continued that the Government of Djibouti is determined to implement a decentralization policy and that the most critical resources needed to bring about its flowering are human and financial. He said his government is currently seeking assistance with training, in order to develop local competence; with infrastructure and equipment-- some of which has been taken care of by the World Bank; and with the establishment of decentralization structures. The Minister referred to his own valuable experience under the U.S. Humphrey program at the University of Pittsburgh to support his request for assistance with training services. Sisson commented that training is only as good as the resources that are made available for implementation of policy.

3. (U) The Minister said he supported the notion that Djibouti's national budget would help integrate decentralization as a focal point for government. He said the government's primary plan would be to redistribute financial resources collected from taxes in Djibouti city in order to help support districts of the interior. He also noted that 90 percent of all taxes Djibouti receives come from its capital city and with these amounts, the Government of Djibouti would be able to cover decentralization recurrent costs.

4. (U) The Minister provided positive feedback on the consultancy role provided by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), which had just spent one month in Djibouti under a USAID-sponsored decentralization evaluation program. According to the Minister, the two consultants representing IFES developed a more elaborate framework mirroring that of the Ministry's own decentralization plan. This framework, in his view, provided greater details about needed resources and better reflects true government needs.

5. (U) Addressing Sisson's question about the role of civil society and private organizations in the Government of Djibouti's decentralization plan, Bouh made clear that the French model of decentralization, which Djibouti is using, would accomplish this goal. He noted that there are two kinds of decentralization models -- Anglo Saxon and French. Anglo-Saxon decentralization is defined as opposed to the presence of the State whereas the French model views decentralization as the delegation of power to locally elected governments. These locally elected governments would have the responsibility to decide when and how they work with civil society organizations. The Minister emphasized his conviction that non-governmental organization (NGO) training is part of the Government's plan, and the experience of NGOs will be needed if the process of decentralization is to work. Donors already supporting the program, he said, include the World Bank, France, China, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which has funded a study to identify opportunities in the five districts of the country.

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